

Marchers Protest War Taxes

By Nicholas von Hoffman

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The police watched, polite and cooperative. There were too few protesters, a bare 40, to make them nervous yesterday morning.

"Does that bunch make enough money to pay taxes?" one of them asked, regarding the group of inelegant intellectuals who had come to Washington yesterday to tell the Internal Revenue Service that they would not pay for their share of the war.

The tax resisters were gathered around the front of the statue of Jose San Martin in Judiciary Square. On top of the South American revolutionary's outstretched, bronze hand a pigeon studied the leaders of the small congregation:

Barbara Deming, the intense Quaker who'd led a group of women on a visit to North Vietnam; Dave Dellinger, chairman of the National Mobilization Committee that had come so close to immobilizing the Pentagon last fall; William C. Davidson, professor of physics at Haverford College; Arthur Waskow, a historian from the Institute of Policy Studies.

Later they marched to the IRS building on Constitution Avenue where they met with Deputy Assistant Commissioner Leon C. Green. There they would see an unauthorized sign saying "BOMB HANOI" in a second-story window, and they would make mind-blunting ironies about the Oliver Wendell Holmes quotation chiseled in the IRS stone: "TAXES ARE WHAT PAYS FOR A CIVILIZED SOCIETY."

In front of the statue they were subdued. They were like people forcing themselves to talk above a whisper perhaps they were intimidated by the granite ornamented

symbols of power around them, perhaps because they feared what they were doing was illegal and they might have to go to jail for it.

"Did you hear?" somebody else inquired, "that they're not accepting dollars in Germany? Afraid of devaluation."

"I'm supposed to be going to Europe next week," Davidson remarked, "What kind of money should I use? Canadian?"

I fell to Waskow to make the principal speech beneath the equestrian San Martin who now had a second pigeon on him, this one walking on his head:

"This is the right day to talk about money because it is Black Friday for the American dollar. The President has wrecked the dollar with his private war. The war has wrecked a strong economy. The President is waging a private war. He has no more right to conscript our men and our money for his war than for his ranch."

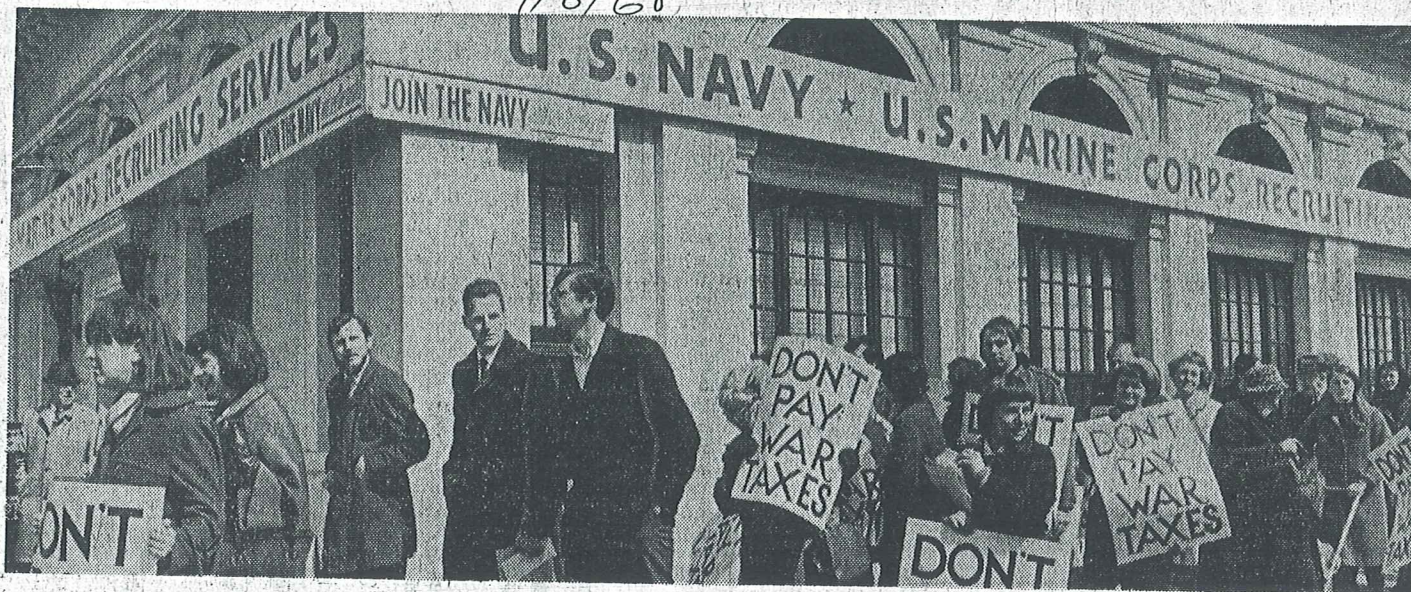
Then Waskow drew back. There is the possibility of a conspiracy indictment. (Deputy Assistant Commissioner Green said IRS was looking into it only in a routine way.) Waskow wanted it understood he wasn't urging anybody to refuse to pay; to make his point he told a story about how William Penn wore his sword even after his conversion to Quakerism, and how a co-religionist told him, "You must keep wearing your sword until you can bear it no longer." I say, "You must keep paying those taxes until you can bear it no longer."

Waskow finished his speech, quoting from folksinger Phil Ochs: "Call it peace, call it love, call it reason, call it treason; we ain't payin' no more." The resisters marched off for their confrontation and the pigeons took wing.



Arthur Waskow reads an IRS release about persons who refuse to pay all or part of their taxes.

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Photos by Matthew Lewis—The Washington Post

Protesters of taxes for the Vietnam war march toward the Internal Revenue Service building where they conferred with an IRS official.